



Guard Unveils Leadership Award

On February 26, the New Jersey Air National Guard unveiled a leadership award honoring the memory of 1st Lt. Thomas E. Williams, the New Jersey Air National Guard's first African-American aviator. The ceremony took place at the New Jersey National Guard Headquarters at Fort Dix. Members of Williams' family were presented with an honorary award by Maj. Gen. Richard Cosgrave, Commander of the New Jersey Air National Guard.

Williams enlisted in the Army Air Force in 1942 and entered pilot training at Tuskegee Army Airfield, Ala. Following his separation from active duty, Williams joined the Air Force Reserve and continued his education at Temple, Rutgers and Cornell Universities. When the United States became involved in the Korean conflict, Williams returned to active duty and immediately volunteered for combat duty. He was assigned to Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C. and attended Instructor's

school at Craig Air Force Base, in Selma, Ala. On June 23, 1953, while commuting in full uniform from Eglin Field, Fla., Williams politely declined to yield his seat – third from the back of the bus – and move to the extreme rear of the bus. He was charged under the Jim Crow laws with “being of one race and willfully occupying a seat reserved for another race.” The Florida judge referred the matter to a higher court and released Williams. Local law enforcement officers, unhappy with the decision, charged Williams with speeding in the next town. This led to Williams receiving a letter of reprimand and eventually being discharged under the reduction in force program.

Williams met with the NAACP's special counsel, Thorgood Marshall, and pressed on with his challenge. Marshall requested that Williams be returned to active duty. Instead Williams joined the New Jersey Air National Guard on May 7, 1954, and became the first African American aviator in the New Jersey Air National Guard.

New Jersey was the first state to ban segregation in its National Guard. Williams continued his challenge and testified before the Congress of the United States. He was the first witness called during the proceedings where his eloquence and military bearing had a profound effect on the committee. His testimony was instrumental in the passage of an amendment to the Interstate Commerce Act prohibiting the segregation of passengers on buses or other vehicles on the basis of race or color.

Williams died in a plane crash on Jan. 15, 1955. The cause of the mishap was never determined.

Because of Lieutenant Williams's accomplishments, the New Jersey Air National Guard has created the Lieutenant Thomas E. Williams Leadership Award for New Jersey high school students. The award recognizes students, who display strong personal character, evidence of citizenship, leadership, and dedication in the battle against intolerance.

New Jersey National Guard Deploys For Winter Storm

Following the declaration of a state of emergency by Acting Governor Donald T. DiFrancesco, more than 500 Guard soldiers and airmen were called to state active duty on March 5 to respond to any emergency resulting from the winter storm.

With 32 armories throughout the state, and air units at Atlantic City and McGuire Air Force Base, all areas of the state were readily accessible to National Guard facilities and personnel.

Primary attention is given to communications and transportation. The Army

Guard's 320 2 1-2 ton trucks, 190 5 ton trucks, and more than 400 HUMV's are able to negotiate flooded roadways and reach areas of the Jersey shore otherwise isolated from access by wheeled vehicles.

The National Guard, the only military service responsible for emergency response within their respective state, functions as part of the state-wide emergency operations network, responding to missions prioritized at the state emergency operations center (EOC) at State Police Headquarters in West Trenton. All emergency support mission requests first must

be forwarded through the respective county emergency management offices before they can be assigned to the guard. Guard involvement is coordinated at the New Jersey National Guard EOC located at Fort Dix. EOC personnel assign missions to the units closest to the emergency and best prepared to accomplish that mission.

Guard personnel and equipment have been called upon numerous times in past years to protect the lives and property of New Jersey residents during floods, snow storms, forest fires, civil disturbances, and other natural disasters or calamities.